

REINSPECTION REPORT

Bedfordshire and Luton Education Business Partnership Reinspection

07 October 2004



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Grading

Inspectors use a seven-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The descriptors for the seven grades are:

- *grade 1 - excellent*
- *grade 2 - very good*
- *grade 3 - good*
- *grade 4 - satisfactory*
- *grade 5 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 6 - poor*
- *grade 7 - very poor.*

Inspectors use a five-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes quality assurance and equality of opportunity. The descriptors for the five grades are:

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 5 - very weak.*

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

SEVEN-POINT SCALE	FIVE-POINT SCALE
grade 1	grade 1
grade 2	
grade 3	grade 2
grade 4	grade 3
grade 5	grade 4
grade 6	grade 5
grade 7	

Adult Learning Inspectorate

The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) was established under the provisions of the *Learning and Skills Act 2000* to bring the inspection of all aspects of adult learning and work-based learning within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- work-based learning for all people over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- the University for Industry's **learndirect** provision
- Adult and Community Learning
- learning and job preparation programmes funded by Jobcentre Plus
- education and training in prisons, at the invitation of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons.

Inspections are carried out in accordance with the *Common Inspection Framework* by teams of full-time inspectors and part-time associate inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work which they inspect. All providers are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

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REINSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Bedford and Luton Education Business Partnership (BLEBP) manages a range of subcontractors providing Entry to Employment (E2E) programmes for young people in Bedfordshire. BLEBP has increased the number of staff responsible for managing this provision since the previous inspection. The E2E manager is now supported by a full-time database co-ordinator and a full-time administration assistant. A full-time basic skills tutor has recently been appointed. The E2E manager reports directly to the executive director. There are six subcontractors based in Bedford, Luton, Dunstable and Barton-le-Clay, of which only three were involved in the previous inspection. One of the subcontractors has only been providing the programme for two months. Most of the subcontractors' staff have changed since the previous inspection. The programmes are funded by Bedfordshire and Luton Learning and Skills Council.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Foundation programmes

2. There are 96 learners on E2E programmes. All learners are referred to the programmes by their Connexions personal adviser. They receive an initial assessment and induction when they start their programme. This includes an initial assessment for literacy and numeracy, an introduction to health and safety and equal opportunities, and information about the provider. Learners work through a programme which includes social awareness, drug and alcohol awareness, jobsearch, an outdoor activities course, and visits to local places of interest. They may also receive vocational training in music, sport, information and communications technology (ICT), hairdressing and beauty therapy, parenting, and loft insulation. All learners can receive additional support to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. Learners can gain accreditation in sports leadership, computer literacy and parenting. Some subcontractors offer learners the opportunity to gain qualifications that will enhance their employability, such as first aid, health and safety and basic food hygiene. Learners attend for an average of 22 weeks for a minimum of 16 hours a week.

ABOUT THE REINSPECTION

Number of inspectors	4
Number of inspection days	13
Number of learner interviews	22
Number of staff interviews	5
Number of subcontractor interviews	16
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	7
Number of visits	1

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

3. At the previous inspection, foundation training was judged to be satisfactory as were BLEBP's arrangements for equality of opportunity. However, the company's leadership and management and quality assurance were unsatisfactory. At the end of the reinspection, all aspects of the provision are satisfactory or better.

GRADES

Grades awarded at previous inspection

grade 1= outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = unsatisfactory, grade 5 = very weak

Leadership and management	4
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	3
Quality assurance	4
Foundation programmes	3
Contributory grades:	
Life Skills	3

Grades awarded at reinspection

grade 1= outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = unsatisfactory, grade 5 = very weak

Leadership and management	3
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	3
Quality assurance	3
Foundation programmes	2
Contributory grades:	
Entry to Employment	2

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

4. **There is good development of learners' skills and confidence.** Learners gain a great sense of achievement from completing the tasks they are set. Some also improve their teamworking skills by organising team sports activities for their peers. Tutors give learners continuous feedback on their progress.

5. Fifty-two per cent of learners who started in 2002-03 successfully completed the programme. So far, 30 per cent of learners who started in 2003-04 have successfully completed the programme, and a further 30 per cent are still in learning. Retention rates are satisfactory.

Quality of education and training

6. **Training has improved since the previous inspection and is now good.** The training programmes are now structured and delivered well. They are planned around the learners' needs and interests. All programmes have detailed schemes of work which cover all aspects of the E2E programme. Tutors provide good support and coaching and use a range of activities to help learners achieve the targets for each learning session. Training programmes include a good selection of enrichment activities such as outings, outdoor activities courses, and visits from outside speakers.

7. **Tutors use resources particularly effectively.** Teaching accommodation and ICT facilities are satisfactory, but the subcontractors make special arrangements to use external resources for sound recording or sports. One training subcontractor has good, industry-compatible music technology equipment. Speakers with expert knowledge on drug and alcohol misuse or sexual health are invited to the centres regularly to speak to learners.

8. **Formal progress reviews have improved since the previous inspection and are now very effective.** All learners have detailed learning plans which are reviewed regularly. All learners now have a monthly progress review, with their tutor and Connexions personal adviser, which is recorded in detail. Learners are fully involved in the process and are very clear about what they have achieved and what their targets are for the next week.

9. **There is very good personal support for learners.** Tutors create a caring, secure and stimulating environment in which learners feel comfortable about approaching them to discuss difficult personal issues. Tutors go out of their way to provide support while encouraging learners to find ways of solving their own problems.

10. **There are insufficient work-placement opportunities.** Subcontractors have difficulty finding work placements for their learners. However, one subcontractor has negotiated some very successful work placements.

11. **There is still insufficient support for learners' literacy and numeracy needs.** Since the previous inspection, the support available to learners has improved. A well-qualified and experienced specialist tutor has recently been appointed and is working at four subcontractors' sites. However, the specialist tutor has not yet been able to contribute fully to all the learners' learning plans, and some learners are not receiving this support.

Leadership and management

12. The board and senior managers give **clear strategic direction**. All staff and subcontractors are aware of BLEBP's purpose and aims. They share the same commitment to improving and enlarging the learning provision.

13. **The management of training is now very effective**. This area was identified as a weakness by the previous inspection. BLEBP agrees clear targets for retention rates and numbers of positive outcomes with each subcontractor. Each subcontractor's managers and trainers attend regular meetings with the E2E manager to discuss the programme and share good practice. BLEBP monitors the qualifications of subcontractors' staff, and has funded a range of training for them including courses in initial assessment, health and safety and training the trainer.

14. The analysis and use of data was identified as a weakness by the previous inspection. This is now satisfactory. Data on learners' gender, disabilities, ethnicity and age is analysed to identify trends in recruitment, progress and achievement.

15. **BLEBP promotes equal opportunities well**. It uses images of learners from different ethnic backgrounds in its marketing materials. It places advertisements in publications for people from minority ethnic groups and in mainstream local newspapers. BLEBP set a target of recruiting 40 learners from minority ethnic groups in 2003-04, and this has been achieved.

16. **BLEBP provides good resources for subcontractors** to help them raise learners' awareness of equality of opportunity. In addition, the company organises training for learners and staff to help reinforce their understanding, and equality of opportunity is discussed at regular meetings with subcontractors.

17. BLEBP supplies its subcontractors with a comprehensive equal opportunities policy. This covers most recent legislation and clearly itemises the responsibilities of staff. The company checks that its subcontractors adhere to equal opportunities practices, and reviews their equal opportunities policies annually.

18. Staff and learners have a satisfactory understanding of equality of opportunity. Equality of opportunity is introduced clearly at induction and learners are given useful information booklets on diversity. Learners' understanding of equal opportunities is reinforced well throughout the programme using discussions and learning tasks.

19. Learners can choose from a wide range of training opportunities offered by the subcontractors. Their particular needs are well catered for, and their life experiences are built upon during training sessions. Learners have good access to training and can move between subcontractors to benefit from the different opportunities. They are made to feel welcome and valued by friendly and caring staff.

20. Some subcontractors' premises have training rooms on the first and second floor, with no lifts to allow access for those with restricted mobility. Access has been

considered at all the subcontractors, but in some cases it is difficult to make alterations to the buildings. There are no examples of learners being unable to attend the E2E programmes because of lack of access.

21. **BLEBP has no formal strategy for the development of equal opportunities.** There are no plans to monitor action and report back to managers and subcontractors. Plenty of data is collected every month about the ethnicity, gender and achievements of learners at each subcontractor, but this is not analysed in detail or used to create action plans which might improve the training provision.

22. **Staff have received little training on identifying or supporting learners with additional learning needs** such as dyslexia or dyscalculia. However, the staff development plan includes proposals for subcontractors to have training on literacy and numeracy, and some learners have been referred to a local college for dyslexia testing.

23. BLEBP is unable to offer training to any learners who need language support, as it has no provision to meet such needs.

24. Quality assurance arrangements were judged to be ineffective at the time of the previous inspection. These have been significantly improved and are now satisfactory. There are quality assurance systems for many of the key aspects of learning, including planned observations of training sessions and progress reviews. Some observations of training and formal reviews have already taken place, but some of the systems are very new and have yet to be applied across all subcontractors and their staff.

25. BLEBP collects feedback from learners through a series of interviews which take place throughout the programmes. The results of individual learners' feedback are shared with the subcontractor that provides their training, and some improvements have been made to the training as a result. However, learners' feedback is not analysed sufficiently to identify trends across all programmes, and is not shared with all the subcontractors. Subcontractors attend regular meetings at which aspects of the E2E programmes are discussed and some actions are identified or monitored, but there is no overall programme review.

26. Each of the subcontractors completed its own self-assessment reports. These were used as the basis for BLEBP's most recent company report, which was produced in August 2004. This report contains useful information and accurately identifies a number of the company's strengths and weaknesses.

27. The judgement of the inspectors is that the quality of provision has improved since the time of the previous inspection.

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During the reinspection process, the inspectors identified the following strengths and weaknesses:

Leadership and management

Strengths

- clear strategic direction
- good management of training
- good promotion of equality of opportunity

Weaknesses

- no formal strategy for developing equality of opportunity
- insufficient quality assurance of training

Foundation programmes

Strengths

- good development of learners' skills and confidence
- good training
- particularly effective use of resources to support learning
- very effective formal reviews of progress
- very good personal support for learners

Weaknesses

- insufficient work placements for some learners
- inadequate support for learners' literacy and numeracy needs

DETAILED REINSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

During the reinspection process, the inspectors identified the following strengths and weaknesses:

Strengths

- clear strategic direction
- good management of training
- good promotion of equality of opportunity

Weaknesses

- no formal strategy for developing equality of opportunity
- insufficient quality assurance of training

28. The board and senior managers provide clear strategic direction. All staff and subcontractors are aware of the company's aims and are well informed about operational issues which affect the business. The E2E programmes are an integral part of the company's strategy. The subcontractors understand the company's goals and share the same intentions to improve and enlarge the learning provision. BLEBP has clear business and development plans which identify the key performance indicators and objectives for the programmes and staff. The board of directors regularly monitors progress against an action plan which was written after the previous inspection. The company has made a significant investment in increasing its own staff and training the subcontractors' staff to improve the quality of learning.

29. Management of training was identified as a weakness by the previous inspection. BLEBP has improved a number of aspects of its management, and it is now good. The company now has a contract and a service level agreement with each subcontractor. Managers are very effective at communicating the key priorities for the provision to subcontractors. There are clear targets for retention rates and numbers of positive outcomes. Since the previous inspection, meetings have focused more on improving the provision. The management style is open and BLEBP staff have good working relationships with the subcontractors. The managers and trainers from each subcontractor attend regular meetings with the E2E manager to discuss the programme and to share good practice.

30. The analysis and use of data was identified as a weakness by the previous inspection, but it is now satisfactory. The company now has an effective system that provides accurate and timely information. Data is more reliable and reports are accurate. BLEBP collects data about learners' gender, disability, ethnicity and age, and analyses it to identify trends in recruitment, progress and achievement. There is a

rigorous approach to monitoring learners' progress. A computerised management information system is used to analyse the performance of each subcontractor each month, and compare this with the performance of the subcontractor group as a whole. This information is shared with the subcontractors and trends in learners' outcomes are discussed. BLEBP produces monthly reports that show how long each learner has been in learning. If learners have been on the programme for longer than 22 weeks, the reasons are examined. BLEBP helps subcontractors to set more challenging targets for learners, and if necessary it transfers learners to an alternative subcontractor. The rates of positive outcomes are improving. BLEBP monitors the qualifications of subcontractors' staff and has funded a range of staff development including training in initial assessment, health and safety, and training the trainer, to better meet the needs of learners.

31. The management of literacy, numeracy and language support is inadequate. There is a strategy for its provision, and a qualified tutor has recently been appointed. A number of subcontractors' staff are also being supported to take appropriate qualifications. The results of learners' initial assessments are now recorded in their E2E passport. However, these improvements are so recent that few learners have yet benefited from them. BLEBP does not currently offer training to any learners who need language support, as there is no provision to meet these needs at present.

32. BLEBP has successfully acted to improve the quality of its training provision in the two years since the previous inspection. As BLEBP has developed its quality assurance systems these have been shared with the subcontractors. However, a number of the arrangements have only been implemented very recently and have yet to affect the learners' experience.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

33. BLEBP's promotion of equal opportunities is good. It uses images of learners from different ethnic backgrounds in its marketing materials. Advertisements are placed in publications for people from minority ethnic groups as well as in mainstream local newspapers. The organisation has made a successful bid for a minority ethnic student achievement grant. As part of the bid, BLEBP set a target of recruiting 40 learners from minority ethnic groups to start in the current year. This has been achieved.

34. BLEBP has provided good resources to help subcontractors raise learners' awareness of equality of opportunity. These include a training manual, videos and posters to raise understanding of disability and diversity. In addition, BLEBP organises training events for learners and staff to help reinforce understanding. For example, at a recent event, a celebrity guest gave a talk about the importance of respect for difference and of not judging people by how they look. Equality of opportunity is also discussed at regular meetings with training providers.

35. BLEBP supplies a comprehensive equal opportunities policy to its subcontractors. It covers most recent legislation, clearly lists the responsibilities of staff and how equality of opportunity will be monitored, and gives clear explanations of equal opportunities

terms. BLEBP checks that subcontractors adhere to equal opportunities practices and reviews their equal opportunities policies every year.

36. Staff and learners have a satisfactory understanding of equality of opportunity. All learners know who to complain to if necessary. Equality of opportunity is introduced at induction and learners are given useful information booklets on diversity. Learners' understanding of equal opportunities is reinforced well throughout the programme in discussions and learning tasks, and checked at progress reviews. Learners are encouraged to research a different religion to their own. BLEBP's staff discuss and monitor equality of opportunity at their regular review visits to subcontractors.

37. Learners' needs are well catered for by a wide choice of subcontracted training providers. Learners have good access to training and can move between providers to benefit from the different opportunities they offer.

38. Most of the training environments are bright and stimulating, and very welcoming and inclusive. Learners are made to feel welcome and valued by friendly and caring staff. Existing learners support new learners, and the subcontractors develop a safe and conducive learning environment. For example, at one subcontractor, new learners are allocated a 'buddy' to help them settle in.

39. Some of the subcontractors' premises have training rooms on the first and second floor but no lifts to allow access for people with restricted mobility. BLEBP has carried out an access audit at its head office, and an automatic door has been fitted. Access has been considered at all the subcontractors but at some of the venues it is difficult to make alterations to the buildings. There are no examples of any learners being prevented from attending the E2E programmes by the lack of access. BLEBP can make alternative arrangements for training when necessary.

40. BLEBP has no formal strategy for the development of equal opportunities. Actions are not monitored and reported on to managers and subcontractors. There is no clear plan to promote equal opportunities to employers. Data is collected every month about the ethnicity, gender and achievements of learners at each subcontractor, but it is not fully analysed or used to improve the training provision. The data shows differences in achievement for different groups of learners but BLEBP has not yet developed an action plan to deal with these.

41. Staff have received little training on identifying or supporting learners with additional learning needs such as dyslexia or dyscalculia, although some learners have been referred to a local college for dyslexia testing. The staff development plan includes plans for training providers to have training on literacy and numeracy. One subcontractor has a member of staff fluent in sign language.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 3

42. Quality assurance arrangements were judged to be ineffective at the time of the previous inspection. These have significantly improved and are now satisfactory. The

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company has introduced a quality assurance policy and, more recently, a quality assurance manual. It has also helped some subcontractors to draw up quality procedures to support this policy.

43. There are systems in place to assure the quality of many of the key aspects of learning. All schemes of work follow a standard plan. Learning sessions are structured and well planned. Some learning sessions and progress reviews have been observed. Staff have been given clear feedback, and sessions have been graded against specific criteria. The outcomes of observations are discussed with staff, and their future development needs are identified. However, some of these systems have been introduced very recently and have yet to be applied to all subcontractors and their staff. The subcontractors have all signed service level agreements with BLEBP, and now have a better awareness of their responsibility for improving the quality of the provision. However, a number of planned appointments to observe training have been cancelled by subcontractors' staff and the observations have not yet been carried out.

44. Learners' feedback is collected through a series of interviews during the programmes. The results of individual learners' feedback are shared with their training provider, and some improvements are made to the training as a result. For example, learners with one subcontractor were unable to recall references to health and safety regulations in their induction, and the subcontractor has subsequently revised the content of the induction. Learners' feedback is not sufficiently analysed to identify trends across all programmes and is not shared with all the subcontractors. Subcontractors attend regular meetings to discuss the quality of the provision and to share examples of good practice. Some identified actions are monitored, but there is no overall programme review. Minutes of meetings are satisfactorily recorded and many show actions to be completed.

45. Each of the subcontractors completed their own self-assessment reports, and these were used as the basis for BLEBP's most recent report which was produced in August 2004. This report contains useful information and accurately identifies a number of strengths and weaknesses.

46. The judgement of the inspectors is that the quality of provision has improved since the previous inspection.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Foundation programmes

Grade 2

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Entry to Employment	96	2

During the reinspection process, the inspectors identified the following strengths and weaknesses:

Strengths

- good development of learners' skills and confidence
- good training
- particularly effective use of resources to support learning
- very effective formal reviews of progress
- very good personal support for learners

Weaknesses

- insufficient work placements for some learners
- inadequate support for learners' literacy and numeracy needs

Achievement and standards

47. There is good development of learners' skills and confidence. Learners gain a great sense of achievement from completing the tasks set in their workbooks and training plans. Their folders contain examples of personal projects, including CDs they have cut, work required for accreditation and records of jobsearch activities. There is evidence of learners using budgeting skills for planning group outings. Learners demonstrate their teamworking skills by organising team sports activities for their peers. Tutors give learners continuous feedback on their progress. They award them in-house certificates for the completion of each life skills unit on health and safety or equal opportunities. Learners can gain accreditation in sports leadership, information technology and parenting. One subcontractor offers learners the opportunity to gain certificates in first aid, health and safety and basic food hygiene. Learners at the end of their programme can clearly articulate the next step on their career path.

48. Fifty-two per cent of learners who started in 2002-03 successfully completed the programme. So far, 30 per cent of learners who started in 2003-04 have successfully completed the programme and a further 30 per cent are still in learning. Retention rates are satisfactory.

Quality of education and training

49. Training has improved since the previous inspection and is now good. The training programmes are now structured and delivered well. They are planned around learners' needs and interests. All programmes have detailed schemes of work which include vocational skills, social and personal awareness, and literacy and numeracy skills. Learners work through the modules at their own pace with the support of a tutor. They receive a great deal of individual attention. Tutors provide good support and coaching and use a range of activities to help learners achieve the targets for each learning session. For example, a group discussion on equal opportunities was followed by learners using a desktop publishing package to illustrate their understanding and interpretation of equal opportunities. All the learning sessions observed were satisfactory or better. Training programmes include a good selection of enrichment activities such as outings, outdoor activities courses and visits from outside speakers.

50. Tutors use learning resources particularly effectively. Teaching accommodation and ICT facilities are satisfactory, and the subcontractors also make special arrangements to use additional local resources such as a sound recording studio or sports facilities. One training subcontractor has good, industry compatible equipment for music technology. Training venues are in areas familiar to learners and easily accessible by public transport, although they are not all accessible to learners with restricted mobility. Speakers with expert knowledge on drug and alcohol misuse or sexual health are invited to the centres regularly. Staff teams have a range of qualifications, skills and experience in industry and youth work which contribute to the diversity of the learning programmes.

51. At the previous inspection, learners' progress reviews were an area of weakness. They have now improved and are very effective. All learners have detailed learning plans which are reviewed regularly. They now have a monthly progress review with their tutor and their Connexions personal adviser. Many also have fortnightly tutorials during which they review their progress towards the programme objectives and agree new targets. Detailed records are kept of learners' progress. Tutors record the activities completed each week, and set an action point for the following week. Learners are fully involved in the process and are very clear about what they have achieved and what their targets are.

52. BLEBP provides very good personal support for learners. Tutors create a caring, secure and stimulating environment and learners feel comfortable about approaching tutors and discussing difficult personal issues. Tutors go out of their way to provide support while encouraging learners to take independent action to find a solution to their concerns. There are good links with local organisations, and learners are referred to specialist agencies for help with problems such as homelessness and bereavement. There is also good support for new learners from those who have been on the programme longer. Many learners continue their involvement with the subcontracted providers after they have finished the programme. At one subcontractor, previous learners from the parenting programme now contribute to a teenage pregnancy programme in local schools.

53. There are insufficient work-placement opportunities. Subcontractors have difficulty in finding work placements for their learners. However, one subcontractor has negotiated very successful work placements for some learners. For example, one was placed with the local dog warden, then volunteered with an animal charity and is now attending agricultural college. Another subcontractor arranges work placements for some learners within its own organisation. Some are subsequently employed by the organisation.

54. There is insufficient support to meet the learners' literacy and numeracy needs. Since the previous inspection, BLEBP has appointed a well-qualified and experienced specialist tutor who is now working at four subcontractors' sites. Good use is being made of skills for life resources. Learners receiving support now have individual learning plans which includes detailed and clear targets. However, these arrangements are very recent and the specialist tutor is not yet able to contribute fully to all the learners' learning plans. Learners who need support do not yet all receive it.

Leadership and management

55. The E2E programmes are managed well. Communications between BLEBP and the subcontractors are good. Monitoring of the six subcontractors has improved. There are now service level agreements with each subcontractor, and regular meetings are held to improve the provision. The rates of positive outcomes for learners are improving.

56. The quality of the provision has improved since the previous inspection. Key elements of the learning process are now being observed. Regular meetings of the provider and subcontractors encourage subcontractors to share good practice and make improvements to their own provision.

57. BLEBP has provided its subcontractors with effective support and help with staff development. For example, all subcontractors have been able to attend training on health and safety and risk assessment. Arrangements are also in place to train one subcontractor's staff towards the new level 3 qualification in numeracy support.

58. Each subcontractor contributed to the self-assessment process. BLEBP's latest self-assessment report identifies two of the same strengths and one of the weaknesses identified by the inspectors.

59. Equality of opportunity is discussed during learners' induction and reinforced during formal reviews. Learners have a satisfactory understanding of equal opportunities.